AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following listing of claims replaces all prior versions of claims in the application.

1. (Previously Presented): A method of producing a thermoelectric conversion material, wherein, in producing a thermoelectric conversion material comprising a porous material composed of a sintered body, microparticles having a particle diameter of 1 μm or less or a fibrous substance having a diameter of 1 μm or less that serves as a void-forming agent is mixed with a base powder, and in sintering this mixture, the mixed powder is sintered in an atmosphere of an inert gas, a reducing gas, or a controlled oxidizing gas so that after the densification of a solid part formed by sintering the base powder proceeds, the void-forming agent is removed from the sintered body, thereby producing a thermoelectric conversion material in which continuous electrical conduction paths composed of

independent closed pores having an average pore diameter of 1 μm or less or independent closed air tubes having an average diameter of 1 μm or less are provided inside the material.

2. (Cancelled).

3. (Cancelled).

4. (Cancelled).

5. (Cancelled).

6. (Previously Presented): A method of producing a thermoelectric conversion material, wherein, in producing a thermoelectric material composed of a sintered body, microparticles having a particle diameter of 1 μm or less or a fibrous substance having a diameter of 1 μm or less that serves as a void-forming agent is mixed with a base powder, and in sintering this mixture, the mixed powder is sintered at a temperature lower than the temperature at which the void-forming agent is gasified, dissolved, or melted so that after

the densification of a solid part formed by sintering the base powder proceeds, the void-forming agent is removed, thereby producing a thermoelectric conversion material in which continuous electrical conduction paths composed of independent closed pores having an average pore diameter of 1 μm or less or independent closed air tubes having an average diameter of 1 μm or less are provided inside the material.

7. (Previously Presented): The method of producing the thermoelectric conversion material according to claim 1, wherein the void-forming agent is removed by gasification, dissolution, or melting.

8. (Previously Presented): The method of producing the thermoelectric conversion material according to claim 1, wherein, after the densification of the solid part proceeds, sintering is performed at a temperature higher than the temperature at which the void-forming agent is gasified so that the void-forming agent is removed by gasification.

9. (Cancelled).

10. (Cancelled).

11. (Cancelled).

12. (Previously Presented): The method of producing the thermoelectric conversion material according to claim 6, wherein the void-forming agent is removed by gasification, dissolution, or melting.

13. (Previously Presented): The method of producing the thermoelectric conversion material according to claim 6, wherein, after the densification of the solid part proceeds, sintering is performed at a temperature higher than the temperature at which the void-forming agent is gasified so that the void-forming agent is removed by gasification.

14. (Previously Presented): The method of producing a thermoelectric conversion material according to claim 1, wherein the distance between nearest voids composed of the

independent closed pores or the independent closed air tubes is 5 μm or less, and the density of the number of voids is $1 \times 10^{10}/cm^3$ or more.

15. (Previously Presented): The method of producing a thermoelectric conversion material according to claim 6, wherein the distance between nearest voids composed of the independent closed pores or the independent closed air tubes is 5 μm or less, and the density of the number of voids is $1 \times 10^{10}/cm^3$ or more.